

Entangled Cultures

How Humans and Microbes Co-create through Fermentation

Curated by **Toni Gentilli**

March 8, 2025 through December 5, 2026



Top to bottom, left to right: Making cheese, wine, sauerkraut, and sourdough. Adobe Stock Images. Roman amphora, Zulu beer strainer, Lele palm wine cup, P'urhépecha bread bowl. Photographs by Toni Gentilli. Scanning electron microscope images of *Schizosaccharomyces*, *Lactobacillus* spp., *Aspergillus* spp., and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. Photographs by Telspec; Jeol Ltd.; Rujira Thongluedee, Tipachai Vatanavicharn, Tanyarat Sutthiphatkul and Duangjai Ochaikul; Morgana Das Murtey and Patchamuthu Ramaswamy.



Maxwell Museum
of Anthropology

Education Guide

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology encourages faculty and staff to visit our newest exhibition, *Entangled Cultures: How Humans and Microbes Co-create through Fermentation*. This exhibit explores the interplay of cultural and microbiological forces from the origin of our species through the development of fermentation practices across human and microbial cultures.

We invite you to share information about this exhibition with your undergraduate and graduate students and consider integrating the content into your syllabi and scheduling a visit or a tour for your class(es).



Left: Yue Ware celadon glazed ewer, Eastern Jin Dynasty, Zhejiang province China. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology 2012.91.83. Right: Stoneware ewer with amber glaze, Liao Dynasty, northern China. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology 2012.91.64. Photograph by Karen E. Price.



Left: Polychrome ceramic kero, Wari Culture, Peru. Gift of Mrs. Agnes M. Walker, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology 96.36.5. Right: Embossed silver alloy aquila, Tiwanku culture, Peru. Gift of Nicholas J. Bleser, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology 70.47.4. Photograph by Karen E. Price.

For more information, or to schedule a tour for the upcoming semester, please email our Education Division at maxeducation@unm.edu

Exhibition Summary

Microbes are tiny living things that are everywhere on Earth and come in more types than any other organism. Even though they're very important, anthropology (the study of human cultures) hasn't focused much on how humans and microbes interact. But now, scientists are more interested in how humans and microbes have evolved together, and new research tools are helping us understand the creative ways humans and microbes have shaped each other's lives. There's even a new field called ethnomicrobiology that studies this relationship.

One of the clearest and longest-lasting examples of humans and microbes working together is fermentation. This process has been used for thousands of years to make, improve, and preserve all kinds of foods and drinks. People all over the world have created special tools, containers, and methods to ferment local ingredients like fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, and dairy. Fermented foods and drinks are a big part of many cultures—they're used in celebrations, as medicine, to bring people together, and even in spiritual practices.

The Entangled Cultures exhibit at the Maxwell Museum shows different tools and containers from around the world that people have used to make and enjoy fermented foods and drinks. The exhibit starts by explaining how fermentation might have helped early humans develop smaller stomachs, bigger brains, and the ability to live in new places. It also talks about the history of common fermented foods like wine, beer, bread, and cheese. The exhibit explores how the relationship between humans and microbes has changed over time and ends by looking at how fermentation might help us deal with climate change and build better connections with other species in the future.

Themes and concepts explored in the exhibit

- The ways in which human relationships with microbes through fermentation have developed and evolved over time across cultures.
- How humans shape and are shaped by the broader context of life within which we exist.
- The benefits (humans) of fermentation, such as enhanced flavor, nutritional quality, and digestibility, immune system modulations, and altered states of consciousness.
- Anthropological approaches to understanding fermentation and the co-creational relationships between people and microbes.
- Past, present, and future uses of fermentation.

About the Maxwell Museum

Location

The Maxwell Museum is located east of University Blvd. between Las Lomas Rd. and Dr. M. L. King Jr. Ave. See <https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu/about/visit-us> for directions

Hours (Museum & Store):

Tuesday - Saturday: 10am - 4pm
Closed Sundays, Mondays and all major holidays
Free and open to all

Parking

10 free parking spaces are available just west of the museum, parallel to University Blvd. Parking permits are available inside at reception. Paid parking areas are west of the Museum adjacent to permitted spaces and north of Las Lomas Rd.

Contact

To schedule a tour, contact the Education Division at maxeducation@unm.edu
<https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu>

If you would like to bring your class for a self-guided visit, please let us know so that we can try to ensure that there are no other groups visiting during that time.

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology

Working toward greater understandings of the fullness of human experiences
in the Southwest and the world.

Vision

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at UNM contributes to
Reconciling injustices
Restoring voices
Realizing community

Values

The Staff at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at UNM embrace these values in all they do:
Uphold integrity through honesty and transparency
Act with courage and take informed risks
Lead with humility and own our mistakes
Embrace inclusivity with openness and sincerity
Embody dynamism and manifest meaningful change
Excite curiosity and the passion for learning